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The

WisDOT Connector

Informing Wisconsin on key transportation issues



Spring/Summer 2004

Slow down in WORK ZONES

With more than a 55% increase nationally in work zone fatalities between 1997 and 2002, work zone safety is a growing roadway safety concern. In 2002, there were 1,181 work zone fatalities; this figure represents 2.8% of all roadway fatalities for the year. Four out of every five work zone fatalities were motorists.

In all, there were 117,567 work zone crashes and over 52,000 people were injured in work zone crashes (1.8% of all roadway injuries).

Each year both highway workers and motorists are killed and injured in crashes that happen in highway construction zones.

Work zone crashes in Wisconsin claimed the lives of 12 people in 2003, an increase of four from 2002 and the most killed since 1999 when work zone crashes killed 17 people.

In the past five years there have been an average of 2,000 crashes in work zones yearly in Wisconsin, with an average of 11 fatalities each year. Most of those killed in work zone crashes are the motorists.

Here's some tips for driving safely in work zones:

- Expect the unexpected
- Slow down
- Don't tailgate
- Don't speed
- Keep a safe distance between you and the car ahead of you
- Pay attention to the signs
- Watch for and obey road crew flaggers
- Stay alert and minimize distractions
- Merge as soon as possible
- Schedule enough time to drive safely and check radio, TV and Web sites for traffic information
- Observe posted signs
- Be patient and stay calm

Work zones are necessary to improve the roads and keep the travelling public safe.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) is dedicated to reducing congestion and crashes due to work zones.

Information about Wisconsin's work zones and traffic can be found at www.dot.wisconsin.gov/travel/road/index.htm



**REALLY
Give 'em a Brake**

Highway operations keeps Wisconsin moving

It provides a safe, reliable, efficient way to grow Wisconsin's economy



Highway Operations removes snow...



keeps traffic signals operating...



maintains roadsides...



and performs pavement and shoulder maintenance, just to name a few of the things they do.

Like maintaining a car – regularly changing the oil, rotating the tires, and replacing the air filter – investments in maintaining and operating Wisconsin's highway system are important if highways are to serve as a safe and reliable route and last a long time. If the roadway doesn't get the maintenance it needs — regularly filling potholes, maintaining shoulders, and applying fresh paint along road-edge lines — it can lead to disruptions in service, increasing risks to safety or to big, expensive problems later.

This issue of the Connector will review what highway maintenance and operations is and its importance to the state's economy. ♦ ♦ ♦

Highway operations adds safety to Wisconsin's highways

Highway maintenance and operations includes a wide variety of day-to-day operations for the state highway system, which includes Interstates and numbered US and Wisconsin highways. These essential services include:

- ♦ Snowplowing, salting, and anti-icing efforts to keep roads and bridges clear and safe in winter
- ♦ Putting up and maintaining regulatory, warning and guide signs
- ♦ Repainting lines on the pavement
- ♦ Keeping traffic signals operating and adjusting signals to traffic conditions
- ♦ Performing pavement and shoulder maintenance on roads, including repair of potholes, elimination of shoulder drop offs and emergency pavement repairs
- ♦ Monitoring and inspecting bridge conditions and security, including repair and operations of bridges
- ♦ Cleaning ditches and culverts and removing litter
- ♦ Mowing roadsides, primarily to preserve safety
- ♦ Maintaining rest areas, waysides and truck scales
- ♦ Applying engineering solutions and practices to improve safety, such as

freeway service patrols, intelligent transportation systems and control signals

- ♦ Conducting the activities necessary to preserve and improve the cost-effectiveness of investments in the state highway system by keeping traffic flowing efficiently and dealing with incidents that delay travel

Each of these functions adds to the safety, security, reliability and efficiency of the state highway system. By continuing to provide those services, highway operations saves money, time and lives. It saves money by helping get the most out of our transportation investments. It saves time by making the transportation system operate more efficiently and reliably, allowing just-in-time shippers to keep to their tight schedules. And it saves lives by making safety enhancements where they are needed.

♦ ♦ ♦

Heavy winter brings challenges

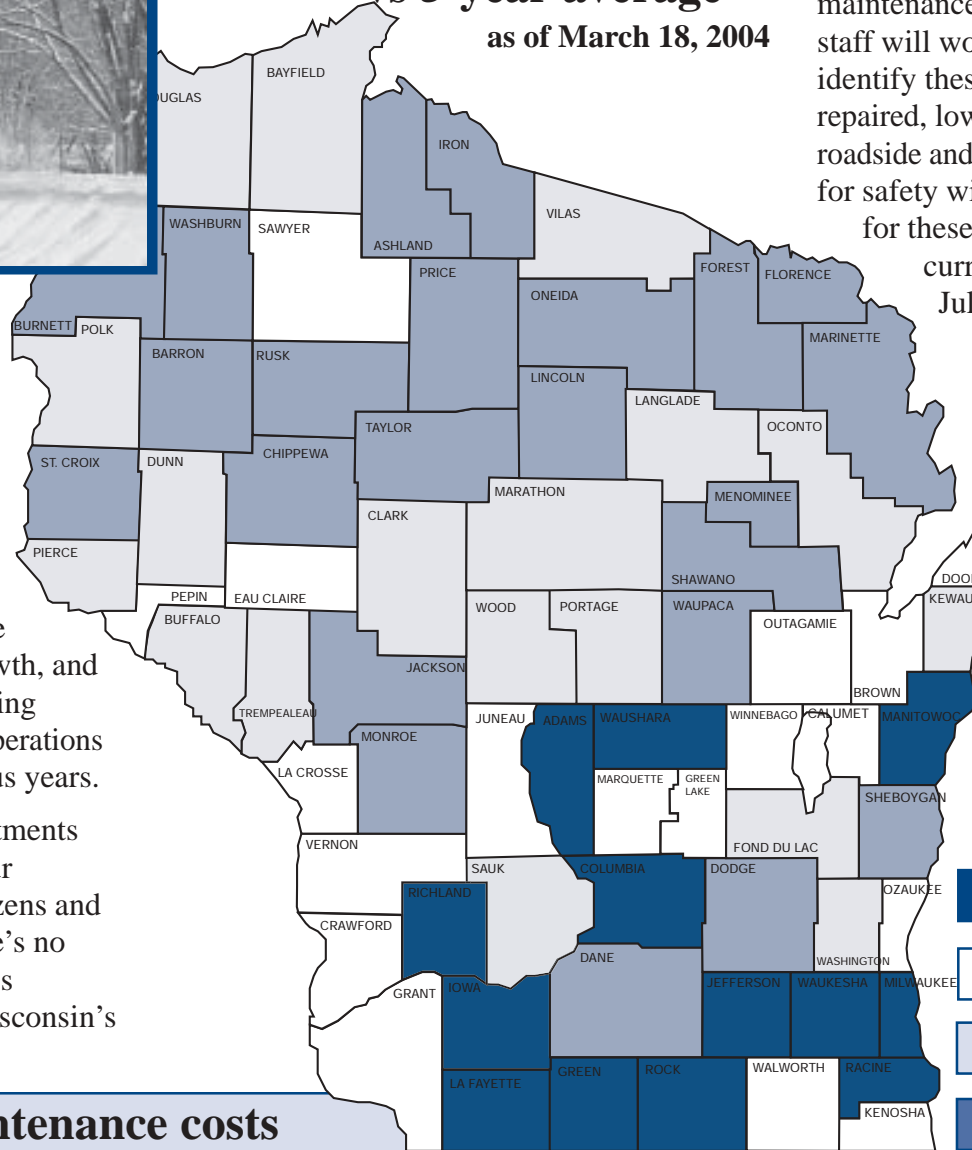
Thus far, county highway departments have met the challenge of keeping our highways open and allowing our citizens and commerce to continue to flow. There's no question that maintaining Wisconsin's transportation corridors is vital to Wisconsin's

- ◆ replacing non-regulatory signs

The fact is that the State of Wisconsin's highway system has many immediate needs in the areas of pavement, shoulder and roadside maintenance, and WisDOT has asked the counties to continue to provide essential summer maintenance service as in past years. County staff will work closely with department staff to identify these activities. Potholes will be repaired, low shoulders will be corrected, and roadside and vegetation management necessary for safety will be completed. However, paying for these critical functions will drain our current fiscal year's resources before July 1, 2004.

The department will work with the legislature to resolve the highway operations and maintenance budget issues. The department will also continue to stay in contact with county highway commissioners to keep them informed about the status of the highway operations and maintenance budget and its effect on their ability to provide necessary services.

The state has a huge investment in its highways and it makes good sense to give them the attention they need to keep them in good repair and to provide the tools required to keep travelers informed.



Season	Winter costs up to April 15, 2004	Winter costs after April 15, 2004	Total
98/99	32.9	0.0	32.9
99/00	31.6	0.3	31.9
00/01	49.8	0.1	49.9
01/02	31.8	0.6	32.4
02/03	33.1	0.4	33.5
03/04	32.9	5.2	38.1

The chart on the right shows the average tons of salt used for the previous five winters and actual salt use for the past three winter seasons.

Month	99/03	01/02 season	02/03 season	03/04 season
November	20,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
December	85,000	30,000	35,000	70,000
January	120,000	85,000	70,000	145,000
February	85,000	75,000	85,000	115,000
March	50,000	90,000	75,000	45,000
April	20,000	15,000	55,000	0

Scenic stops give motorists pause

Through the years, waysides have offered travelers a place to stop, stretch their legs, breathe deeply, and take in the smells, sights and sounds around them. Often, waysides were destinations, where families stopped to have a picnic in the countryside.

Early waysides consisted of rural school grounds and country churchyards with their two little familiar “houses” out back.

Often, though, waysides were little more than a grassy strip of land adjacent to a state or US highway that may have had a few trees, picnic tables, and, if the traveler were lucky, a pit toilet or outhouse.

In 1931 the Wisconsin Legislature authorized highway beautification, and later, the familiar waysides: small roadside parks at

first, many of which had no water or sanitation. In 1940, the County Highway and County Boards Association were joined by other organizations to aid the State Highway Commission in roadside development and to increase and improve waysides. The scenic, rustic waysides grew in numbers after the close of World War II, peaking at about 268 in 1977.

As public expectations changed and operational costs increased, the number of waysides declined. In 2003, there were approximately 100 seasonal, rustic waysides located along rural highways along with 32 year-round modern rest areas, six of which serve as Travel Information Centers at the

state’s borders. Year-round rest areas have full-service restrooms, drinking water, picnic areas, telephones, snacks, and soft drink vending machines. Many also are equipped with weather monitors.

Teams of people work behind the scenes to keep rest areas and waysides clean, safe and in good working order. These services are funded and managed by WisDOT’s Highway Operations Program. Local



Rest area #22, located at I39/90, northbound - offers many amenities

Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) provide the day-to-day maintenance at each rest area and some waysides. The CRP’s provide employment for people with disabilities who might otherwise have limited employment opportunities. Rehabilitation For Wisconsin (RFW), a private non-profit organization, provides direction for the CRP’s.

The department had also planned to close about half its rustic waysides, but Governor Doyle felt that they needed to stay open because they were important to the state’s economy, tourism, and way of life. The department will continue to work with local communities and other agencies to identify sites that may be transferred to different ownership and operation. When there is a clear benefit and local interest in closing a site, the department will pursue that as well. The department is also working with the Department of Tourism to address the operation of travel information centers at Genoa City and Hudson. ♦ ♦ ♦



The first waysides consisted of little more than a grassy strip of land

Burning preserves prairie remnants

Prairies are made up of mostly grasses, sedges (grasslike plants) and other flowering plants called forbs (e.g. coneflowers, milkweed). Historically, wildfires played a very important role in shaping prairies. Fire keeps forest plants from taking over and allows the soil to warm up quickly, making the prairie plants grow back faster.

Prior to European settlement, about seven million acres of southern and western Wisconsin were covered by oak savanna and prairie. Today, less than one percent of these two types of plant communities remain. A savanna is much like a prairie in species composition except that it contains trees that form less than 50% canopy cover. Many believe that the protection and restoration of remnants of these plant communities, as well as re-establishing these communities in areas where they once existed, is necessary in order to preserve our natural heritage. Indeed, without such efforts, these plant communities are in danger of becoming extinct in the state.

As grasslands are lost, so are the animals that live there. In order to protect and maintain the biodiversity of prairie ecosystems, special restoration techniques, such as prescribed or controlled burning (burning on purpose for specific reasons), can give grasslands a chance for rebirth.

Controlled or prescribed burning is an ecological and economical method of limiting exotic and unwanted brush invasions that crowd out native vegetation and also:

- ♦ Stimulates prairie grass growth and improves habitat for upland game and waterfowl.



Janet Smith, of WisDOT’s Wisconsin Rapids Transportation District, is surveying the smoke and flame as it travels away from the highway. When burning along the highway, smoke is always a concern for traffic safety.

- ♦ Improves cover type for upland nesting birds, such as pheasants, and spurs native vegetative growth for songbirds.

Prescribed burns help to preserve grasslands and native flora, plant species that were sustained by natural fires before settlement. The risk is very small, but the benefits are very large. Each fire not only restores a natural landscape, but it gives ecologists a chance to learn how nature regulates its plant and animal diversity.

WisDOT is in a unique position to play a key role in the effort to preserve this part of our heritage. Many of the prairie remnants exist on highway rights-of-way, especially on older roads and more especially on older roads that run parallel and in close proximity to railroad tracks. These are situations where these plant

See “Burn” on back page

Transportation is vital to keeping Wisconsin’s economy strong

Public transportation investments and fixing existing bridges and roads can create jobs, while yielding other benefits such as promoting more transportation choice and even reducing taxpayers’ future tax liabilities by making sure the infrastructure we’ve already paid for stays in good repair. Transportation is a good investment. Several studies clearly prove that point:

- ♦ A Cambridge Systematics study found that for every dollar of additional investment in the state highway system beyond what’s needed to maintain current conditions, Wisconsin would enjoy three dollars of benefit.
- ♦ A separate study concluded that every dollar invested in public transit in the state also generates over three dollars in economic returns.
- ♦ And a recent report from the Surface Transportation Policy Project shows that investments in road and bridge repair and maintenance create nine percent more jobs than even road construction projects do.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation will continue to plan, promote, and support balanced investments in road, air, rail, and water transportation — as well as bicycle and pedestrian facilities that aid economic development and growth.

WisDOT initiates Traffic Operations Plan

WisDOT’s first statewide Traffic Operations Plan (TOP) began with a comprehensive inventory of activities associated with the traffic operations function - including everything from signing, marking and traffic signals to traffic incident management and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS).

Next steps will include a review of opportunities for more efficient service delivery through effective partnerships. These partnerships will strengthen relationships between district and central office business areas, between WisDOT staff and private sector service providers, and between state and local governments.

Subsequent TOP activities will include establishing a business plan to track performance and cost effectiveness within WisDOT’s traffic operations function. TOP will also incorporate prior plans developed for ITS, traffic incident management programs, and traffic management alternate route studies into a statewide traffic operations vision. This vision will offer a highway operations and traffic management dimension that can be considered along with highway infrastructure needs in the department’s strategic and long range transportation planning.

WisDOT is considering offering the WisDOT Connector in an electronic format instead of print.

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“Burn” continued from page 3

communities have not been subjected to disturbance by agricultural and construction activities.

WisDOT has also attempted to re-establish and invigorate native grasses and forbs in appropriate areas on highway rights-of-way in recent years through the use of special seed mixes and through management practices such as controlled burning. There are several other reasons for their preservation and re-establishment:

- This diversity helps fend off epidemics of diseases and pests which could cause serious problems in areas where only a few species exist.

- Most of the species in these communities have large, deep root systems which hold the soil in place more effectively than the Eurasian grass species and invasive weedy species customarily found along roadsides.

- The large number and diversity of species present is aesthetically pleasing.

Wisconsin’s climate is such that, if left alone, prairies and savannas will eventually become forests. In fact, both species composition and quality will decline in a relatively short period of time without the benefit of fire.



WisDOT makes Wisconsin’s highways safe

WisDOT is continuing efforts to make Wisconsin’s highways as safe as possible. In 2004, the department’s Strategic Highway Safety Plan will be updated in coordination with priority traffic safety engineering initiatives.

A comprehensive road weather safety audit will compare historical information about weather conditions and weather-related crashes. This audit will help identify hazardous road weather areas before more severe crashes occur. The audit will allow WisDOT to improve highway planning and design standards, traffic management and traveler warning strategies and driver training and education practices.



Statewide traffic safety engineering projects will include an analysis and evaluation of intersection

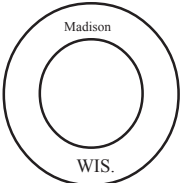
crashes. An early emphasis of the intersection safety program will be unsignalized intersections, including those along high-speed expressways.

Wisconsin is one of several select national “lead states” in highway safety planning and is working closely with the American Association of Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the Federal Highway Administration to reduce injuries and fatalities - particularly at unsignalized intersections.

Another statewide project is studying run-off-the-road types of crashes and will investigate traffic crashes and cross-over hazards associated with freeway and expressway medians.



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